

February 16, 2005

I have a quick message this week, and that is to keep all the soldiers in Iraq and around the world, in your thoughts and prayers. This week I received a message from one of our firefighters in Iraq, and I wanted to share a little bit with you.

“Mr. Mayor,

I wanted to take some time and drop you a note from your guys in Iraq. I cannot believe we've been here for more than a month already, but with the pace of our days, time seems to go by very quickly. We are all stationed together and work at the same fire station. We have three firehouses on base and our base has a population of about the same number as Troy. We work 24 hours on and 24 hours off, but our off days are spent working most times with special details. Some of the details we do are mandatory but some are voluntary. We volunteer for three missions here on base. First, we volunteer at the AFTH (Air Force Theater Hospital) Emergency Room, where our skills as Paramedics and EMT's are used regularly. We see many wounded and unfortunately some deceased members of the coalition. Our hospital is on par with Albany Medical Center, similar in style to MASH, but has most of the new technologies to treat our troops. Secondly, we volunteer at the CASF (Contingency Aero medical Staging Facility) where we sit and talk with wounded troops until the plane is readied to airlift them to other hospitals out of country. We then assist the CASF team with loading these men and women onto the aircraft for their continued medical transport and treatment. This is usually done after midnight and could last three to four hours nightly. Finally, we volunteer for a mission that we all believe to be the most noble of the three; it is called the Patriot Detail, and this detail pays full military honors to the deceased soldiers while they are being placed onto aircraft for their journey to their families and their home. It is very humbling to salute the flag draped caskets as they pass by to begin their final journey home. Fortunately, this mission has not occurred as often as one would expect it to, however, there have been several since our arrival in country.

Since being in this position, it has become glaringly obvious that the press is only interested in reporting the ugly side of our situation over here. I'm sure they are rethinking their reporting after a significantly higher percentage of Iraqis than they predicted turned out to vote despite the threats against their families and themselves. We've been told several times that the Iraqis want us here to stabilize their country and secure freedom for them. We believe this to be true and we're honored to be a part of this process.

In closing, we would like to express our gratitude for the support you've shown us and our families during our deployment. We couldn't accomplish our mission here without the support of our employer – you – and for your support we say thank you! We're looking forward to a conclusion of our time here and a return to normalcy.

Sincerely,

DAVID M. PAUL, MSgt, USAF
Station Captain, Station # 1
Balad AB Fire Department
Balad AB, Iraq

That is a simple letter that reminds you how easy we have it here. Please keep Dave, and Firefighters Tom Miter and Frank Shoemaker in your thoughts.

See you next week.

Harry J Tutunjian
Mayor of Troy